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**INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ON LAOS**

**as of 1100, 24 March 1961**

**Soviet Bloc**

Soviet broadcasts have noted increasing tension regarding the Laotian situation and reported US military activity in the area. The US press was cited for reports that three aircraft carriers, four destroyers, and two landing ships with Marines aboard were heading there, and that Marine Corps units in Okinawa and various units of the "Strategic Army Corps" have been alerted.

Moscow asserted last night that meetings in Washington and SEATO military advisers were summoned "to prepare the military aspects of SEATO's intervention in Laos." Secretary Rusk, the broadcast said, told the British and French ambassadors of the US intention to propose to SEATO that new armed forces--possibly including US troops--be set up to restore order in Laos. The broadcast concluded that it is no longer a question of American support for "putschists" but of a direct US armed aggression against Laos, and asked how US "propaganda statements" that the US favors peace in Laos and supports Laotian neutrality can be taken seriously.

Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Winiewicz told Ambassador Stevenson in New York yesterday that the Laos situation could be resolved by creation of a new government under Souvanna Phouma with Pathet Lao participation.

State Department review completed

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Asia

In Vientiane, Prince Boun Oun has praised President Kennedy for his "tough stand". He said Laos would call on SEATO for military help if needed.

In Bangkok, diplomatic and military observers gathered for the SEATO meeting greeted President Kennedy's statement as giving SEATO new life, energy and importance. They also viewed his statement as giving the U.S. increased prestige.

Prime Minister Nehru, with reference to the latest British proposals to the USSR, said in Parliament on 24 March that they seem very close to Soviet proposals. He said that if the USSR should accept the British proposals, India, as chairman of the ICC, would be glad to reconvene the Commission, probably in New Delhi initially. The proposed international conference could meet afterwards. Nehru expressed the hope that these efforts meet with success.

Near East

UAR President Nassir in talks with neutralist Laotian ex-premier Souvanna Phouma, last night agreed on the following points: announced in a joint communique on 24 March:

- (1) That the International Control Commission...be revived in order to achieve a cease fire and prevent all foreign intervention.
- (2) That a conference of the...members of the Geneva Conference and five other states be held to enable Laos to solve its internal problems and remain neutral.
- (3) That the aspirations of the Laotian people be guaranteed

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Western Europe

Preliminary public reaction from British and French governments has been entirely favorable. Prime Minister Macmillan told the press he "warmly endorsed" the President's stand just before flying off to the West Indies. In the House of Commons Lord Privy Seal Heath asserted that US-BK consultations had not been concerned with the use of British forces, although he did not rule out their use in view of Britain's NATO obligations. French Ambassador Alphand in Washington told the press the President had made a "good approach," adding that we must try to negotiate with the Russians. We do not yet have any extensive press commentary from Western Europe and Latin America.

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4:4 of 1100, 25 March 1961

Summary:

International press reaction to the President's 23 March statement on Laos has continued along earlier lines, and there has been no significant reaction by Soviet media.

Soviet Bloc:

Moscow has still made no comment on the President's statement beyond the brief mention in its domestic broadcasts that the President had held a news conference "which was devoted to the situation in Laos."

A Hanoi broadcast this morning, in language which was neither as abusive or as belligerent as Peiping's, claims that the President's statement that the US wishes a free and independent Laos is merely camouflage for "the artful maneuvers of the US imperialists." Asserting that the President "has revived the slanderous charge of the Dulles warlike clique that North Vietnamese military men have entered Laos," Hanoi then quotes Souvanna Phouma to buttress its claim that there are no foreign troops other than Thai and South Vietnamese in Laos.

The East German, Hungarian and Czech radios, in broadcasts to Europe, sharply criticized the President for his use of "old methods"--practiced by the previous Administration--to resolve an international crisis. The East Germans assessed the President's statement as a "threat of direct armed intervention" and proceeded to recount various military preparations under way.

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The Czech and Hungarian treatment parallels the German, emphasizing the lack of sincerity in the President's statement. The other European satellites have not yet commented. The Yugoslav radio, transmitting a broadcast of its New York correspondent, regretted the ultimatum aspects of the President's statement and the "creation of a war psychosis" and emphasized the need for negotiation.

Western Europe:

The press this morning also reports that France officially supports the US position on Laos, although reluctantly. Unofficial comments by French officials have stressed what they regard to be American "mistakes" which precipitated the present crisis.

Middle East:

Cairo Radio, describing President Kennedy's statement on Laos as "very cautious," warned that his call for peace and reconciliation can only be realized if fighting is stopped immediately, with the cease-fire being supervised by a tri-partite commission of India, Canada and Poland.

Far East:

A press report from Manila this morning states that "high diplomatic sources" there believe that US policy toward Laos is "foredoomed." These officials are reported to feel that the situation has deteriorated to the point where any compromise settlement will favor the pro-Communist forces. The best result that may be expected, in Filipino eyes, is a cease-fire and a partition of Laos.

A South Korean news commentator, speaking over the government-controlled radio on 24 March, also alluded to the prospect of a divided Laos. He expressed the view that it is hardly to be expected that the Communists

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will voluntarily surrender territory they occupy--regardless of any settlement that may be achieved in the Lachien crisis. He pointed to the Korean experience as a precedent, and stated that the dispatch of US troops to Laos is inevitable.

In Japan, the opposition Socialist Party has issued a statement declaring that negotiations for the neutralization of Laos should commence immediately. It also warned the Japanese government against permitting the United States to use forces based in Japan or China for intervention in Laos.

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